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ABSTRACT

Sexual harassment and exploitation exist in every culture no matter how advanced and civilized that culture is. The difference is only in degree rather than in kind. One example of such fulmination and exploitation can be found in the media. In order to see to what extent the abuse of women persists in the media of two very large and very different societies, commercials on Indian and U.S. television were studied. Television commercials were selected because: in spite of the growing concern and opposition from the feminist movement, TV commercials continue to portray the negative image of the gender bias role of females; television ads are a reflection of society; the gender stereotypes are more explicit in television commercials than any other regular programming; and the humiliation of women is nowhere more evident than in TV commercials. The study reveals that while U.S. television commercials continue to present only one aspect of women's life (their relationship to men as wives, subordinates, or sex-objects); Indian TV commercials are imitating the Western tradition and increasing the abuse of women every day. The sad thing is that men and women do not react to this impropriety in the same way. In fact many men like it as it is. The change in this traditionally locked image, however, must take place, and it must take place now if the coming generation is to be saved from this stereotypic gender image. (Author/DB)

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The Image of Women in the American and Indian TV Commercials
A Comparative Analysis

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The Image of Women in the American and Indian TV Commercials

A Comparative Analysis

Introduction

There is an increasing amount of concern about the portrayals of stereotype sex roles, and about the influences and consequences these portrayals have had on the society. As the feminist movement is becoming more and more popular, more attempts are being made for the emancipation of women from the stereotype sex roles. However, any attempt of such an emancipation must first carefully consider how these sex roles are acquired for the first place.

The media are the most pervasive of all the sources of gender stereotypes. Whether they are print-media, art, songs, films or TV, males and females are presented in stereotyped ways i.e., males are more knowledgeable, rational, independent, better, etc. whereas females are emotional, comparatively less knowledgeable, dependent upon males, subordinates to males, etc. The role of television is considered to be particularly important because - a) an average American spends about one third of their time watching TV, b) it reaches more homes than any mass media means (98%), c) it has the widest audience, it is watched by all kinds of people regardless of their origin, race, religion, social class, age, and sex, d) observational learning from live and symbolic models is the first step in the acquisition of sex-stereotype roles, and e) it does not only reflect the society, but shapes it also.

The sad thing is that the prime time TV continues to portray the negative image or gender bias role of females. Twice as many major roles are given to male characters as are given to female characters. Occupationally, most of the major jobs go to the male characters rather than female characters. Males are portrayed as police officers, detectives, lawyers, doctors, psychologists, etc. whereas females are shown as nurses, secretaries, assistants, teachers, and so on. Also, females are more likely to be shown behaviorally negative or physically weak, mentally incompetent, and emotionally and often financially dependent on males. Males, on the other hand, are depicted as competent, independent, leaderlike, self-confident, skilled, etc. In terms of age too, females in their twenties are often teamed against males in their forties, but the vice-versa is seldom true.

People from somewhat traditional cultures such as Indian culture often think that women in the Western countries and the United States are modern and liberated. This conception is acquired through movies, books, magazines, and other such means. In these media, they find Western women freer to choose their own apartments, jobs, partners, husbands, etc. They are often depicted as pursuing their own interests and hobbies, even after their marriage whether or not their husbands approve it. Both men and women cook, eat food of their own choice, wash their own clothes, and do not impose one's interest on the other.

These behaviors are enough for the average males or females of the Indian sub-continent to get the impression that Western females are somewhat freer from male dominations than they are. And they may be right to certain extent. One example of such an impression came up in the Ms. Universe contest held in Florida early this year. The host of the contest asked Miss India:

"Miss India ! What is your opinion about American women?"
"I think, American women are modern and free." she replied.

However, the fact is that male domination and sexual exploitation persist in all cultures. They differ only in degree.

In order to see how the image of women is portrayed in American and Indian television, I decided to do a project on TV commercials. The reason why I chose TV commercials to be the subject of my study is that a) TV ads are a reflection of society (Dominick 1972), b) the gender stereotypes are even more explicit in TV commercials than in regular programming (Basow 1986), and c) the humiliation of women is nowhere more evident than in TV. commercials (Hennessee 1872)

The objectives of this study were:

1. to describe how females were portrayed in TV commercials.
2. to their portrayals, contrast with that of males,

3. to compare the images of males and females portrayed in American TV commercials with the images of males and females portrayed in Hindi TV commercials.

Review of the Related Literature

The treatment of women as sex objects is an age old practice. According to an Indian story, Ommar Khaiyyam, one of the foremost scholars and poets of Urdu, never poured and drank Sharab (wine) himself. A Saki (women) often poured it for him and took the Paimana (glass) near his lips. Then the poet would hold her around his body with one hand and drink the wine with another. Similarly, there is an unauthorized story of Mougal Emperors of the Indian subcontinent, who kept several wives, sometimes more than a hundred, that, in their old age and often in their middle age too, they would not carry a stick or hold the railings when climbing the stairs. In stead, they would hold the breasts of the women who stood on every step of the stairs. The Rana prime ministers of Nepal too are often considered to be among the most cruel abusers of women. And this is not the story of just Khaiyyam or Rana prime ministers. This is every body's story. Most men is most cultures consider other women or their wives to be their sex objects. I think the portrayals of women as sex objects in paintings, arts, and later in books and magazines and TV is the result of this very attitude.

The portrayals of the female image in advertisements is, thus, not new. People have been depicting the image of women in their papers, magazines, books, etc. for decades now. But only in recent years, has widespread attention against such portrayals been given to it. In the wake of the women's right movement, the criticism of sex-role portrayals has gained its momentum. There has been growing criticism of marketeers' lack of sensitivity to reflect the change in their advertisements. Several studies have reported that advertising perpetuates what they call archaic and distorted sex-role stereotype, and presents them as simple-minded, non-career oriented, male dependent, and also in other tradition-bound roles. Some of the notable works in this area are: Alexander and Judd (1978), Basow (1986), Dominick and Rauch (1972), Goffman (1979), Hennessee and Nicholson (1972), Lundstorm and Sciglimpaglia (1977), Marecek, et al (1978), McArthur and Resko (1975), Mishra (1989), O'Donnell and O'Donnell (1978), Peterson and Kerin (1977), Scheibe (1979), Venkatsan and Losco (1975).

Based on the New York National Organization for Women (NY NOW)'s study of over twelve hundred commercials, Hennessee (1972) reports that women were men's:

Domestic Adjuncts	37.5 %
Dependent on Men	33.9 %
Submissive	24.3 %
Demeaned Housekeepers	22.7 %
Unintelligent	17.1 %
Sex Objects	16.7 %
Household Functionaries	42.6 %

Most of the commercials sell either domestic products or cosmetic products, and in most of these, women's appearance is a must. Above and beyond their consumers' function women are given two stock roles- one of the housewives or mothers, and the other of sex object. In either case, they are viewed in relation to men. As Hennessee et al puts it:

"Biologically, the wife-mother is there to serve the species, socially, her purpose is to serve men, children and animals, and psychologically, she's is an obsessive compulsive"(P. 22). In the case of sex objects: "In the market place of television, women are just another commodity, peddling their wares like the model in the Shop Rite Pantyhose commercials who becomes the product. She sits there in the grocery cart like a big doll, smiling her legs in one of the classic cheese positions, waiting to be picked and bought" (P. 48).

Other research studies report similar findings. The findings are summarized under the following sub-headings: 1. The product 2. The settings 3. The role 4. The appearance/ nudity 5. The voice-overs 6. The attitude 7. The effects.

1. The products

In spite of the fact that products which have traditionally been termed "masculine" are equally purchased by males and females, the TV commercials continue to depict

the sexually stereotype purchases. Women are more likely to be shown buying or representing domestic products such as kitchen items, cosmetics, personal hygiene, etc. whereas men are more likely to be seen purchasing non-domestic products such as cars, trucks, garden equipment, construction equipment. etc. Thus, these commercials support the stereotypic image that women have either no interest or ability in judging non-domestic products.

2. The settings

Almost all of the studies noted in this paper revealed that most commercials using females are for products generally found in the kitchen or bathrooms. Therefore, women were generally seen inside the home. Men, on the other hand, are usually pictured outside the home. They are often depicted in occupational settings. The commercials, thus, portray that the ideal place for women is in the home whereas men are career oriented.

3. The role/occupation

The single most occupation for females as the TV commercials depict is that of the care-taker, and the single most role that of housewife/mother. Women are shown with their housework, their children and family matters. Men are shown working, playing or being nursed.

Women are often used as product representatives for domestic items. men usually represent non-domestic items such as money, business, gas, capital and property.

In the occupational settings, men are executives, managers, chiefs, engineers, doctors, lawyers, etc. Women are low-level employes such as nurses, secretaries, teachers, office assistants, etc.

4. The appearance/nudity

Most of these studies criticize TV commercials saying that they insult and exploit women by portraying them as decorative pieces or sex objects. In most cases women are not shown sufficiently dressed. In many cases, they are shown barely dressed.

Alexander, et al found that this offensive portrayals of women do not help promote the sale of the product as the viewers' attention is diverted to the naked organs of the models rather than the product brand names (P. 50).

The strongest criticism comes from Lundstorm, et al who found that the commercials show men as they really are, but in the case of women, their portrayals are stereotyped and "lack realism". A half naked women, for example, is shown attracted to a man simply because he uses a particular brand of after-shave lotion.

5. The voice-overs

Dominick, et al found that advertisers consider the male voice more authoritative than female voice (P. 262), and that is why "voice-overs tended to be done almost exclusively by men" (O'Donnell 1978). This gives the impression that if certain products are not authorized male voice, whatever the females say about the products would be wrong. Another aspect of this negative portrayals is that females are subjective and, therefore, dependent upon men for authority, conformity, expertise and value.

6. The attitude

Females are not given fair treatments in the TV commercials. Some of the researchers have suggested that this is the second class citizenship handed to women by today's TV commercials. Women are shown helpless until the male voice suggests authoritatively how a certain brand of the product will solve her problem.

The sad fact, however, is that males and females do not react to the negative portrayals of the female image in the same way . In fact, most men like it as it is. This indifferent attitude of men towards the role portrayals is an indication of the fact that men do like the way women are portrayed.

The recent years have observed a gross change in attitude towards the sex-role stereotypes. Venkatesan, et

al., for example, found that women portrayals as sex objects have decreased since 1959 but other stereotypes have not. But the trend of change is slow and often very small in scale. Most advertisers do not realize that "advertising can communicate more if it avoids stereotyped sex-roles (Scheibe, P. 23).

7. The effects

Television is a powerful source of influence on viewers' attitudes and behaviors. Basow, and McArthur et al. suggest that being constantly exposed to the TV world of gender stereotypes helps reinforce adults' own sex-role training.

Watching a great deal of TV results in greater degree of sexism specially in the middle class girls (Basow P.139). People, specially children, imitate the sex-role stereotypes from the TV portrayals. Adults are found to model their own behaviors by watching the same sex television models. As Hennessee writes:

"People tend to imitate the role they see to become what is expected of them. When they are given only one "choice", it inhibits them from choosing freely what they want to be. For the millions of women painfully breaking out of their traditional roles, the persistent TV stereotypes are like a knock on the head telling them to stay in line" (P. 13).

Writing about the commercials on Indian TV, Mishra writes that whether or not the products are for women, the attractive parts of women's body are commonly used to advertise them (P. 16). Women in India are respectful, but being influenced by Western advertising tradition, Indian advertisers have been exploiting women by using their bodies to create glamour in the young generation. Women in the contemporary commercials are not portrayed as respected mothers or sisters but as sex objects (Ibid.).

Writing about the abuse and exploitation of women on the Indian movies, Anita Pratap (1990) makes a very pressing comment that the Indian society is somehow responsible for what is being shown on the theater. Rape, for example, is popular in Indian movies because for the sex-starved Indian male audience, "rape is enjoyable", and "in men's fantasies force is the only way to get women who are otherwise out of reach" (P. 69).

The society holds the victims responsible for what happens to them because it assumes that if they are good, it will not happen to them. Leading self-supported and independent life is also a curse for the Indian women who in that case are often portrayed as corrupt and immoral. The poverty and helpless, ironically, put the women on the offence. Several examples of rape cases can be found in which the rapists were acquitted because "the women were so poor that they could have been bribed to file a false complaint" or because they took, in their helplessness,

"five days to register their complaint" (Ibid). This clearly portrays the Indian male attitude towards women.

Mishra expresses his disappointment by saying that if the portrayals of women as sex objects continue, men will imitate the stereotypic image, and their attitude to see women as sex objects will be reinforced. And the effects, which can already be seen in teenagers, are offensive. The male teenagers are likely to develop the tendency that they are superior to girls in every respect and that girls are just for romance, love and sex (P. 18).

Based on the readings, the study hypothesized that:

1. females are shown with domestic products. Males are shown with non-domestic products.
2. females are shown in side homes (domestic settings). Males are shown in occupational settings.
3. females are depicted as low-level employees. Males are depicted as high-level employees.
4. females are portrayed as sex objects and that they are shown in as little dress as possible.
5. most of the voice-overs are done by men.

Method

42 (14 3) samples of TV commercials were selected randomly from the three major TV networks namely ABC, CBS, and NBC. Each network was viewed during the prime time (i.e. 8.00 P.M. to 10.00 P.M.) on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday.

42 Indian TV commercials were randomly selected. These commercials were obtained from the video casette of Indian movies. The commercials are often inserted in the middle of the movies. Four to five movies were scanned in order to obtain the required number of contextually appropriate commercials.

All commercials then were coded on the prepared coding sheets. The coded data were tabulated, analyzed and interpreted.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The coded data are presented in the following four tables. The analysis of the data and their interpretations follow the tables.

Table- I: Products shown with men and women
(Figures in percentage)

	Products	
	Domestic	Non-domestic
Indian TV		
Men	23.80	76.19
Women	85.71	14.28
American TV		
Men	29.41	70.58
Women	67.64	32.34

The data in Table-I show a clear pattern that men were shown with non-domestic products while women with domestic products. The pattern is even stronger on the Indian TV than on the American TV. 85.71% of women represented household items. If both men and women were present in a non-domestic situation, it was the men who spoke for it. The women in such commercials were either decorations or

sex-objects. The domestic products women were shown with were kitchen items, bathroom items, items of personal hygiene, etc. Men usually represented car, gasoline, medicines, garden or construction equipment, etc. Thus, the data strongly support the hypothesis one.

Table-II: Settings in which men and women were shown with commercial products. (Figures in percentage)

	Settings	
	In the home	Outside the home
Indian TV		
men	9.52	90.47
Women	79.19	23.80
American TV		
Men	35.28	64.71
Women	55.88	44.11

As seen in Table-II, women were usually shown in the home whereas men were outside the home on both the Indian and American TV commercials. More women were shown outside the home on the American TV commercials than on the Indian TV commercials. However, there is nothing to feel happy about it because most of the women shown outside the home were either in the party, playground or swimming pools, half-naked, subordinating men in their activities or being a part of the decoration. On the Indian TV commercials, women were shown as a part of the kitchen. Even if they were listening to the music or talking to a friend on the phone, they must be in the kitchen. Men, however, were shown on the occupational settings, play ground or away from home. When they were shown in the home, there was hardly anything domestic about them. They maintained their status or

position as non-domestic beings. Thus, the data confirms the second hypothesis.

Table-III: Appearances/Roles of men and women in the commercials. (Figures in the percentage)

Appearances / Roles	Indian TV		American TV	
	Men	Woman	Men	Women
Decoration/Sex-objects	9.52	71,42	17,64	47.00
House-mothers/fathers	0.00	28.57	11.76	35.28
Low-level Employee	33.33	0.00	17.64	17.64
High-level Employee	66.66	0.00	52.94	0.00
Nudity	9.52	47.61	-	52.94

Mostly, the women appeared as decorations or sex-objects (71. 42% on Indian TV, and 47% on American TV). If they were given any role at all, they were housewives, mothers, nurses or low-level employees. Men, on the other hand, were rarely shown as sex-objects or fathers. They were either high level employees, players or actors. About 50% women were shown half-naked or with minimum clothes.

On an Indian commercial, for example, a women's naked body was being compared with men's shoe-polish. The commercial was trying to show that shoes polished with a particular brand of shoe-polish looked as good as the clean, smooth body of a naked women. In a commercial for necktie, a half-naked woman was shown hanging on a man like his new tie. The commercial supposedly communicated that a tie of the advertised company looked as attractive as the naked body of the woman. In a cigarette commercial a women was staring at a man with hungry eyes simply because he was smoking a particular brand of cigarette. In an commercial of an after-shave creme, a naked woman was shown

sitting/lying on a rock on the sea-shore and feeling fresh of cool breeze and surf coming from the tides. A man was staring at her and caressing his newly-shaved cheeks as if he was feeling as fresh as the woman on the shore. Similarly, in the commercials of women's panties or bras, the display of women's body was unacceptably nude.

On American commercials, a man was shown feeling as fresh as newly-showered body of a woman if he used the particular brand of after-shave lotion. In a commercial of pain killer medicine, a woman was shown to be happy to have taken the medicine not because she wanted the relief for herself but because her husband was about to come home what he did at the point of her relief. On a beer commercial, two tired men, having drunk a particular brand of beer, were shown to feel as relaxed as they could in the company of a slim, naked and good looking woman.

Men, on the other hand, were rarely shown what may be called nude. In American way of life, men showing their legs or upper part of their body is not considered nude at all. In Indian situation, this may be considered nude, but the definition of men's nudity is not clear.

The data in table-iii supports two hypotheses- hypotheses three and four.

Table-IV: Voice-overs done by men and woman on the commercials. (Figures in percentage)

	Voice-overs	
	Men	Women
Indian TV	85.71	14.28
American TV	78.57	21.43

As it is obvious from the figures given in the table - iv, men on both Indian and American commercials are considered to be the authority in speaking for a commodity. Although, men almost said the same thing in most commercials as women did, men's voice unfailingly always appeared in the last part of the commercials as if it were the seal of authority or conformity. Thus, the last hypothesis that voice-overs are exclusively done by men is confirmed.

Discussion and Conclusion

Given the fact that nearly half of the population in any country is constituted by women, that there are working women now in most cultures, and that women can compete men in every respect, one would generally expect that the TV commercials portray the real and current changes in the status of women and in the attitude towards them. The advertisements, however, reflect only one aspect of women's life, i.e., in their relationship to men, as wives, subordinates or sex-objects.

There is a need of change. And the change has become inevitable because as the number of working women increases and as the actual role of women in the society changes, advertising which remains locked to an older, more traditional image of women becomes less appropriate. And this can be brought by presenting desirable characters for all sexes. But for this, as Lundstorm, et al.(1977) suggests, the advertisers will have to break away from the traditional stereotypes and include the use of:

1. duel roles: it portrays women in roles which are in addition to a more traditional role in the home;

2. role switching: it portrays purchases or uses of products by persons of the sex opposite that of the traditional stereotypes; and

3. role blending: it obscures the sexually stereotypic purchase or uses roles with scenes in which no sex dominates.

The stereotypic portrayals of sex characteristics on TV commercials is a good reason for anyone to be concerned. The influences these portrayals may have on the attitudes and behaviors of the coming generations should be a stronger reason to be so.

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